



Brazoria County Historical Museum

100 E. Cedar, Angleton TX 77515
bchm.org 979-864-1208 ©7/15/2020

Ranching

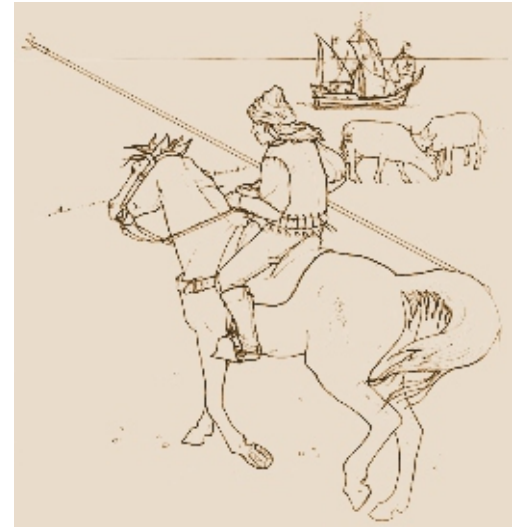
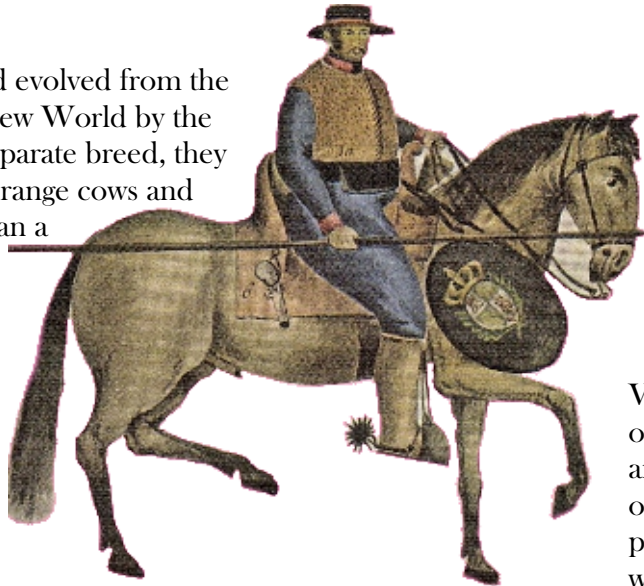
Vaqueros

Spanish settlers brought cattle and horses with them to the New World. Some of these animals became feral and eventually grew into large herds of wild cattle and horses that roamed Texas in the 19th century.

Spanish soldiers used a modified spear to chase down wild cattle for food. The soldiers' gear, including their spurs, leather armor and broad-brimmed sombreros, evolved into the chaps the spurs and cowboy hats still used today.

Vaqueros, (sp: cattle drivers) worked on the ranches of Mexico. They developed the techniques of roping and driving cattle that were adopted by Anglo ranchers in the 19th century.

The Texas Longhorn breed evolved from the wild cattle brought to the New World by the Spanish. Originally not a separate breed, they were considered to be wild range cows and were more of a nuisance than a resource for settlers.



Viewed as an invasive species, the herds of longhorns found pre-settlement Texas an ideal environment to thrive with plenty of food, mild winters, and few native predators. Eventually, herds of millions of wild range cows roamed the Texas prairies.





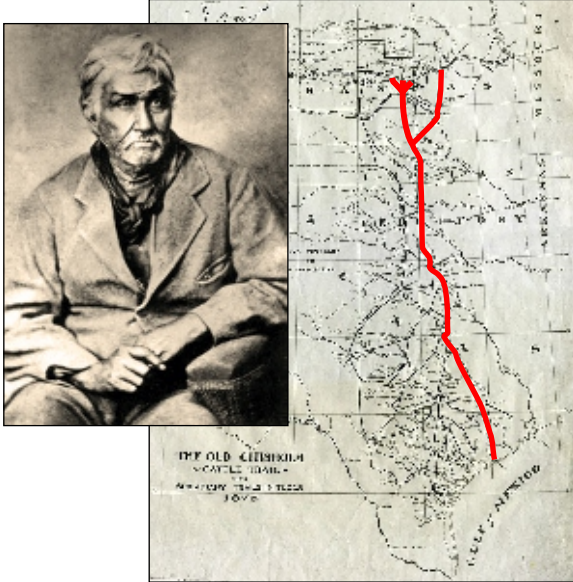
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Ranching

Trail Drives

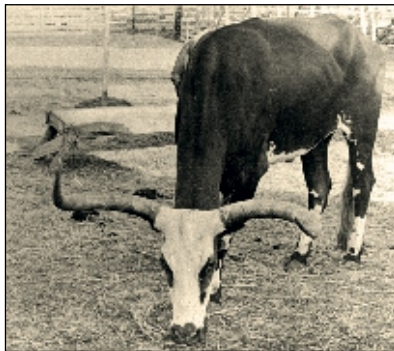
After the Civil War many Texans needed to find an industry to replace the plantation economy. Changing attitudes toward beef had created a demand for canned meat. Texas had plenty of beef, but getting it to the packing plants was an issue. Trail drives became the solution.



Indian trader Jesse Chisolm was familiar with the territories of Oklahoma and Kansas. His trade route proved an ideal path to drive cattle up from Texas to the rail heads of the new transcontinental railroad. The Chisolm Trail was one of several trails that were used to drive cattle to market from Texas.



After the Civil War, landowners realized they could round up the wild cattle on their land, claim them with a brand, and drive them to Kansas where they could be sold for up to \$40 each. Ten to fifteen cowboys could drive up to 3,000 cattle north, which often resulted in a handsome profit.



The first successful trail drive was completed in 1867. The following year almost everyone that could was rounding up cattle and sending them north. During the 20 years of the trail drive era over 5,000,000 cattle were taken to market. By 1887, Texas was linked to the rest of the country via railroads, which ended not only the trail drives but also ushered in the end of the open range. Since cattle now had value, ranchers fenced in their pastures and started to improve their herds with selective breeding.





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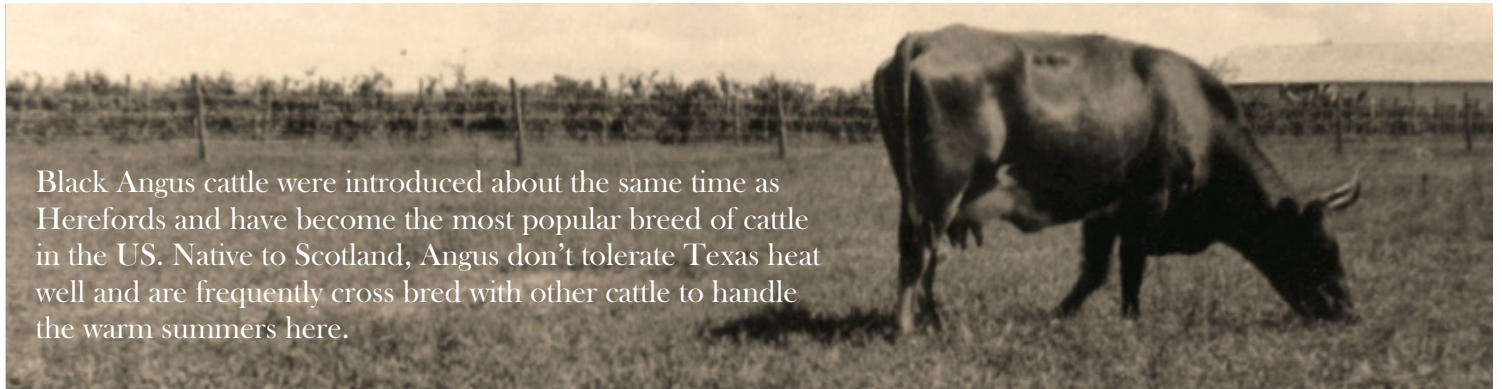
Breeding

Longhorns were known for their ability to thrive on the open range, but they were not known for the quality of their meat. Once ranchers claimed cattle as property, they started breeding them to improve their value.

The American Brahman cattle was the beef cattle breed developed in the US resulting from a cross of three breeds imported from India. Brahmans are known for being very heat tolerant and able to thrive in tropical and sub-tropical climates, such as Brazoria County.



Hereford cattle were introduced to Texas around the turn of the 19th century in an effort to improve the quality of the beef of normal range cattle. The good beef producing quality of Herefords combined with the natural hardiness of the Longhorns produced herds that were more valuable at market.



Black Angus cattle were introduced about the same time as Herefords and have become the most popular breed of cattle in the US. Native to Scotland, Angus don't tolerate Texas heat well and are frequently cross bred with other cattle to handle the warm summers here.

Cross breeding of the Texas native longhorn with other breeds resulted in a decline and the near extinction of the breed. American folklorist and writer J. Frank Dobie was instrumental in reviving the breed by spearheading a project that kept small herds at Texas State Parks. Ranchers still cross breed Longhorns with other breeds, which yields hybrid vigor through the combination of different traits.





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Ranching

Cowboys

Working cattle has always involved hard physical labor, long hours, inclement weather and significant risk, all for low wages. The reality of this bygone era shaped the impression of cowboys that we hold today.



While few women went on the trail drives themselves, far more helped work the cattle at home on the ranch. Many ranches were family operations, and everyone worked cattle regardless of gender.



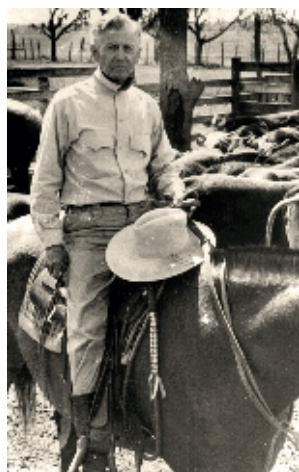
Many freed slaves found work as cowboys, and about 30% of the cowboys in Brazoria County were African-American. This proud tradition continues today.



Van Don Randon, Sr. was the ranch foreman for the Stringfellow Ranch from 1922 to 1977.



S. S. Perry, the great-grandnephew of Stephen F. Austin, owned the Peach Point Plantation and the Perry Ranch where they ran cattle throughout the history of Brazoria County.



Harold Graves of Brazoria was hired by the Texas Southwest Cattle Raisers Association in 1947.



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Ranching

Rodeo

After an annual round-up, cowboys often would demonstrate their skills and compete against each other to see who was best. These activities evolved into the rodeos we enjoy watching today.



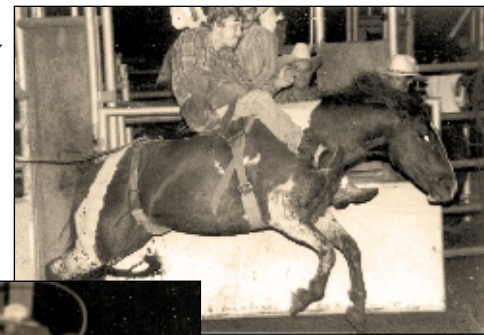
In 1938, Mary Murray was crowned Queen of the Brazoria County Fair.



The T Diamond Rodeo Company was based out of West Columbia. Here, members are performing at the Brazoria County Fair in 1948, by square dancing on horseback.



The Brazoria County Fair has hosted many rodeos over the years, both during the fair and at other times of the year. These are competitions where local cowboys have the opportunity chance to show their skills in riding and roping.





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Ranching

Cowboy Legacy

Open range ended over a century ago, however its legacy remains entrenched in Brazoria County. Both large and small ranches dot the county, and tens of thousands of cattle are still tended here by hundreds of cowboys.

Windmills have allowed ranchers greater flexibility when dividing and fencing their pastures, giving them the opportunity to add water and feed stations wherever necessary.



The sciences of Range Management and Animal Husbandry has changed cattle ranching forever. Herds and pastures are carefully tended to produce the best quality beef possible and maximize yields .



Cowboys still need to ride and rope, but they also need to be able to identify and help treat diseases, manage the grazing land and many other tasks that were not done a century ago.

